

# The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel and a Motion Picture Drama

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## SYNOPSIS.

The New York police are mystified by a series of murders and other crimes. The principal clue to the criminal is the warning letter which is sent the victims, signed with a "clutching hand." The latest victim of the mysterious assassin is Professor Dodge, the insurance president. His daughter, Elaine, employs Craig Kennedy, the famous scientific detective, to try to unravel the mystery. What Kennedy accomplishes is told by his friend James, a newspaper man. By an ingenious ruse Clutching Hand smuggles into Elaine's home a flask of liquid air which she supposed to be a package of valuable papers. It blows open the safe in which it is placed, but Kennedy arrives in time to prevent the robbery. The detective narrowly misses death in his apartment where Clutching Hand has placed a shot gun so that it is fired by the electrical connection formed when Kennedy places his hands on a framed photograph of Elaine.

## FIFTH EPISODE

### The Poisoned Room.

Elaine and Craig were much together during the next few days. Somehow or other, it seemed that the chase of the Clutching Hand involved long conferences in the Dodge library, and even, in fact, extended to excursions into the notoriously crime-infested neighborhood of Riverside drive, with its fashionable procession of automobiles and go-carts—as far north, indeed, as that desperate haunt known as Grant's tomb.

But to return to the more serious side of the affair.

Kennedy and Elaine had scarcely come out of the house and descended the steps, one afternoon, when a sinister face appeared in a basement area-way near by.

It was the Clutching Hand.

He wore a telephone inspector's hat and coat and carried a bag slung by a strap over his shoulder. For once he had left off his mask, but, in place of it, his face was covered by a scraggy black beard. The disguise was effective.

He saw Kennedy and Miss Dodge and slunk unobtrusively against a railing, with his head turned away. Laughing and chatting, they passed. Then he turned in the other direction and, going up the steps of the Dodge house, rang the bell.

"Telephone inspector," he said in a loud tone as Michael, in Jennings' place for the afternoon, opened the door.

He accompanied the words with the sign, and Michael admitted him.

As it happened, Aunt Josephine was upstairs in Elaine's room. She was fixing flowers in a vase on the dressing table of her idolized niece. Meanwhile, Rusty, the collier, lay, half-blinking, on the floor.

"Who is this?" she asked, as Michael led the bogus telephone inspector into the room.

"A man from the telephone company," he answered deferentially.

Aunt Josephine, unsophisticated, allowed them to enter without a further question.

Quickly, like a good workman, Clutching Hand went to the telephone instrument and by dint of keeping his finger on the hook and his back to Aunt Josephine succeeded in conveying the illusion that he was examining it.

No sooner was the door shut than the Clutching Hand hastily opened his bag and from it drew a small powder-spraying outfit, such as I have seen used for spraying bug powder. He then took out a sort of muzzle with an elastic band on it and slipped it over his head so that the muzzle protected his nose and mouth.

He seemed to work a sort of pumping attachment and from the nozzle of the spraying instrument blew out a cloud of powder which he directed at the wall.

Meanwhile, Michael, in the hallway, on guard to see that no one bothered the Clutching Hand at his work, was overcome by curiosity to see what his master was doing. He opened the door a little bit and gazed stealthily through the crack into the room.

Clutching Hand was now spraying the rug close to the dressing table of Elaine and was standing near the mirror. He stooped down to examine the rug. Then, as he raised his head, he happened to look into the mirror. In it he could see the full reflection of Michael behind him, gazing into the room.

"The second!" muttered Clutching Hand, with repressed fury at the discovery.

He rose quickly and shut off the spraying instrument, stuffing it into the bag. He took a step or two toward the door. Michael drew back, fearfully, pretending now to be on guard.

Clutching Hand opened the door and, still wearing the muzzle, beckoned to Michael. Michael could scarcely control his fears. But he obeyed, entering Elaine's room after the Clutching Hand, who locked the door.

"Were you watching me?" demanded the master criminal, with rage.

Michael, trembling all over, shook his head. For a moment Clutching Hand looked him over disdainfully as the clumsy he.

Then he brutally struck Michael in the face, knocking him down. An ex-

governable, almost insane fury seemed to possess the man as he stood over the prostrate footman, cursing.

"Get up!" he ordered.

Michael obeyed, thoroughly cowed.

"Take me to the cellar, now," he demanded.

Michael led the way from the room without a protest, the master criminal following him closely.

Down into the cellar, by a back way, they went, Clutching Hand still wearing his muzzle and Michael saying not a word.

Suddenly Clutching Hand turned on him and seized him by the collar.

"Now, go upstairs, you," he muttered, shaking him until his teeth fairly chattered, "and if you watch me again—I'll kill you!"

He thrust Michael away, and the footman, overcome by fear, hurried upstairs. Still trembling and fearful, Michael paused in the hallway.

He put his hand on his face where the Clutching Hand had struck him. Then he waited, muttering to himself. As he thought it over, anger took the place of fear. He slowly turned in the direction of the cellar.

Meanwhile, Clutching Hand was standing by the electric meter. He examined it carefully, feeling where the wires entered and left it, and starting to trace them out. At last he came to a point where it seemed suitable to make a connection for some purpose he had in mind.

Quickly he took some wire from his bag and connected it with the electric light wires. Next, he led these wires, concealed, of course, along the cellar floor, in the direction of the furnace.

The furnace was one of the old hot air heaters and he paused before it as though seeking something. Then he bent down beside it and uncovered a little tank.

He thrust his hand gingerly into it, bringing it out quickly. The tank was nearly full of water.

Next from his capacious bag he took two metal poles, or electrodes, and fastened them carefully to the ends of the wires, placing them at opposite ends of the tank in the water.

For several moments he watched. The water inside the tank seemed the same as before, only on each electrode there appeared bubbles, on one bubbles of oxygen, on the other of hydrogen. The water was decomposing under the current by electrolysis.

Another moment he surveyed his work to see that he had left no loose ends. Then he quietly let himself out of the house.

The next morning Rusty, who had been Elaine's constant companion since the trouble had begun, awakened his mistress by licking her hand as it hung limply over the side of her bed.

She awakened with a start and put her hand to her head. She felt ill.

"Poor old fellow," she murmured, half dazedly.

Rusty moved away again, wagging his tail listlessly. The collier, too, felt ill.

"Why, Miss Elaine—what does so matter? You are so pale!" exclaimed the maid, Marie, as she entered the room a moment later with the morning's mail on a salver.

"I don't feel well, Marie," she replied, trying with her slender white hand to brush the cobwebs from her brain. "I wish you'd tell Aunt Josephine to telephone Doctor Hayward."

"Yes, mademoiselle," answered Marie.

Languidly Elaine took the letters one by one off the salver.

Finally she selected one and slowly tore it open. It had no superscription, but it at once arrested her attention and transfixed her with terror.

It read:

"You are sick this morning. Tomorrow you will be worse. The next day you will die unless you discharge Craig Kennedy."

It was signed with the mystic trademark of the fearsome Clutching Hand!

Elaine drew back into the pillows, horror-stricken.

Quickly she called to Marie. "Go—get Aunt Josephine—right away!"

And Marie almost flew down the hall. Elaine seized the telephone and called Kennedy's number.

Kennedy, in his stained laboratory apron, was at work before his table, while Elaine was watching him with interest, when the telephone rang.

Without a word he answered the call, and I could see a look of perturbation cross his face. I knew it was from Elaine, but could tell nothing about the nature of the message.

An instant later he almost tore off the apron and threw on his hat and coat. I followed him as he dashed out of the laboratory.

"This is terrible—terrible," he muttered, as he hurried across the campus of the university to a taxicab stand.

A few minutes later, when we arrived at the Dodge mansion, we found Aunt Josephine and Marie doing all they could under the circumstances.

Doctor Hayward had arrived and had just finished taking the patient's pulse and temperature as our cab pulled up.

Elaine was quite ill indeed.

"Oh! I'm so glad to see you," she breathed with an air of relief as Kennedy advanced.

"Why—what is the matter?" asked Craig anxiously.

Doctor Hayward shook his head doubtfully, but Kennedy did not notice him, for, as he approached Elaine, she drew from the covers where she had concealed it a letter and handed it to him.

Craig took it and read:

"You are sick this morning. Tomorrow you will be worse. The next day you will die unless you discharge Craig Kennedy."

At the signature of the Clutching Hand he frowned, then, noticing Doctor Hayward, turned to him and repeated his question, "What is the matter?"

Doctor Hayward continued shaking his head. "I cannot diagnose her symptoms," he shrugged.

There seemed to be a faint odor, almost as if of garlic, in the room. It was unmistakable and Craig looked about him curiously, but said nothing.

As he sniffed, he moved impatiently and his foot touched Rusty, under the bed. Rusty whined and moved back lazily. Craig bent over and looked at him.

"What's the matter with Rusty?" he asked. "Is he sick, too?"

"Why, yes," answered Elaine, following Craig with her deep eyes.

Craig reached down and gently pulled the collier out into the room. Rusty crouched down close to the floor. His nose was hot and dry and feverish. He was plainly ill.

"How long has Rusty been in the room?" asked Craig.

"All night," answered Elaine. "I wouldn't think of being without him now."

"May I take Rusty along with me?" Elaine asked finally.

Craig hesitated. "Surely," she said at length, "only be gentle with him."

"Of course," he said simply. "I thought that I might be able to discover the trouble from studying him."

We stayed only a few minutes longer, for Kennedy seemed to realize the necessity of doing something immediately, and even Doctor Hayward was fighting in the dark.

Back in the laboratory, Kennedy set to work immediately, brushing everything else aside. He began by draw-

"Well," added Craig, "you see, Michael has become infuriated by the treatment he received from the Clutching Hand. I believe he called him in the face yesterday. Anyway, he says he has determined to get even and betray him."

I did not like the looks of the thing, and said so. "Craig," I objected vehemently, "don't go to meet him. It is a trap."

Kennedy had evidently considered my objection already.

"It may be a trap," he replied slowly, "but Elaine is dying and we've got to see this thing through."

As he spoke, he took an automatic from a drawer of a cabinet and thrust it into his pocket. Then he went to another drawer and took out several sections of this tubing, which seemed to be made to fasten together as a fishing pole is fastened, but were now separate, as if ready for traveling.

Then he went out. I followed, still arguing.

"If you go, I go," I capitulated.

"That's all there is to it."

Following the directions that Michael had given over the telephone, Craig led me into one of the toughest parts of the lower West side.

"Here's the place," he announced, stopping across the street from a dingy Rialto law hotel.

"Pretty tough," I objected. "Are you sure?"

"Quite," replied Kennedy, consulting his notebook again.

Reluctantly I followed and we entered the place.

"I want a room," asked Craig as we were accosted by the proprietor, comfortably clad in a loud checked suit and striped shirt sleeves. "I had one here once before—forty-nine, I think."

"Fifty—I began to correct. Kennedy trod hard on my toes. 'Yes, forty-nine,' he repeated.

The proprietor called a stout negro porter, waiter and bell-boy all combined in one, who led us upstairs.

"Forty-nine, sah," he pointed out, as Kennedy dropped a dime into his ready palm.

The negro left us, and as Craig started to enter, I objected. "But, Craig, it was fifty-nine, not forty-nine. This is the wrong room."

"I know it," he replied. "I had it written in the book. But I want forty-nine—now. Just follow me, Walter."

Nervously I followed him into the room.

"Don't you understand?" he went on. "Room forty-nine is probably just

knocked. The footsteps ceased. Then the door opened slowly and I could see a cold blue automatic.

"It's all right, Michael," reassured Craig calmly. "All right, Walter," he added to me.

The gun dropped back into the footman's pocket. We entered and Michael again locked the door. Not a word had been spoken by him so far.

Next Michael moved to the center of the room and, as I realized later, brought himself in direct line with the open window. He seemed to be overcome with fear at his betrayal and stood there breathing heavily.

"Professor Kennedy," he began, "I have been so mistreated that I have made up my mind to tell you all I know about this Clutching—"

Suddenly he drew a sharp breath and both his hands clutched at his own breast. He did not stagger and fall in the ordinary manner, but seemed to bend at the knees and waist and literally crumple down on his face.

We ran to him. Craig turned him over gently on his back and examined him. He called. No answer. Michael was almost pulseless.

Quickly Craig tore off his collar and bared his breast, for the man seemed to be struggling for breath. As he did so he drew from Michael's throat a small, sharp-pointed dart.

"What's that?" I ejaculated, horror-stricken.

"A poisoned blowgun dart, such as is used by the South American Indians on the upper Orinoco," he said slowly.

He examined it carefully.

"What is the poison?" I asked.

"Curari," he replied simply. "It acts on the respiratory muscles, paralyzing them and causing asphyxiation."

The dart seemed to have been made of a quill with a very sharp point, hollow, and containing the deadly poison in the sharpened end.

"Look out!" I cautioned, as he handled it.

"Oh, that's all right," he answered casually. "If I don't scratch myself, I am safe enough. I could swallow the stuff and it wouldn't hurt me—unless I had an abrasion of the lips or some internal cut."

Kennedy continued to examine the dart until suddenly I heard a low exclamation of surprise from him. Inside the hollow quill was a thin sheet of tissue paper, tightly rolled.

He drew it out and read:

"To know me is Death."

"Kennedy—Take Warning."

Underneath was the inevitable Clutching Hand sign.

We jumped to our feet. Kennedy rushed to the window and slammed it shut, while I seized the key from Michael's pocket, opened the door and called for help.

A moment before, on the roof of a building across the street, one might have seen a bent, skulking figure. His face was copper colored and on his head was a thick thatch of matted hair. He looked like a South American Indian, in a very dilapidated suit of cast-off American clothes.

He had slipped out through a doorway leading to a flight of steps from the roof to the hallway of the tenement, and, like one of his native venomous serpents, worked his way down the stairs again.

My outcry brought a veritable battalion of aid. The hotel proprietor, the negro waiter and several others dashed upstairs, followed shortly by a portly policeman.

Craig took the policeman into his confidence, showing him the dart and explaining about the poison. The officer stared blankly.

"I must get away, too," hurried on Craig. "Officer, I will leave you to take charge here. You can depend on me for the inquest."

The officer nodded.

"Come on, Walter," whispered Craig, eager to get away, then adding the one word, "Elaine!"

I followed hastily, not slow to understand his fear for her.

Nor were Craig's fears groundless. In spite of all that could be done for her, Elaine was still in bed, much weaker now than before.

More than that, the Clutching Hand had not neglected the opportunity, either.

Suddenly, just before our return, a stone had come hurtling through the window, without warning of any kind, and had landed on Elaine's bed.

Below, as we learned some time afterwards, a car had drawn up hastily and the evil-faced crook whom the Clutching Hand had used to rid himself of the informer, "Limpy Red," had leaped out and hastily hurled the stone through the window, as quickly leaping back into the car and whisking away.

Around the stone was wrapped a piece of paper on which was the ominous warning, signed as usual by the Hand:

"Michael is dead."

"Tomorrow, you."

"Then Kennedy."

"Stop before it is too late."

Elaine had sunk back into her pillows, paler than ever from this second shock.

It was just then that Kennedy and I arrived and were admitted.

"Oh, Mr. Kennedy," cried Elaine, handing him the note.

Craig took it and read. "Miss Dodge," he said, as he held the note out to me, "you are suffering from arsenic poisoning—but I don't know yet how it is being administered."

He gazed about keenly. Meanwhile, I had taken the crumpled note from him and was reading it. Somehow, I had leaned against the wall. As I turned, Craig happened to glance at me.

"For heaven's sake, Walter," I heard

him exclaim. "What have you done up against?"

He fairly leaped at me and I felt him examining my shoulder where I had been leaning on the wall. Something on the paper had come off and left a mark on my shoulder. Craig looked puzzled from me at the wall.

"Arsenic!" he cried.

He whipped out a pocket lens and looked at the paper. "This heavy, fuzzy paper is fairly loaded with it, powdered," he reported.

Kennedy paced the room. Suddenly, pausing by the register, an idea seemed to strike him.

"Walter," he whispered, "come down cellar with me."

"Oh! Be careful!" cried Elaine, anxious for him.

"I will," he called back.

As he flashed his pocket bull's-eye about, his gaze fell on the electric meter. He paused before it. In



Kennedy Discovers the Secret of the Poisoned Room.

spite of the fact that it was broad daylight, it was running. His face puckered.

"They are using no current at present in the house," he ruminated, "yet the meter is running."

He continued to examine the meter. Then he began to follow the electric wires along. At last he discovered a place where they had been tampered with and tapped by other wires.

"The work of the Clutching Hand!" he muttered.

Eagerly he followed the wires to the furnace and around to the back. There they led right into a little water tank. Kennedy yanked them out. As he did so he pulled something with them.

"Two electrodes the villain placed there," he exclaimed, holding them up triumphantly for me to see.

"Yes," I replied, dubiously, "but what does it all mean?"

"Why, don't you see? Under the influence of the electric current the water was decomposed and gave off oxygen and hydrogen. The free hydrogen passed up the furnace pipe and combining with the arsenic in the wall paper formed the deadly arsenuretted hydrogen."

He cast the whole improvised electrolysis apparatus on the floor and dashed up the cellar steps.

"I've found it!" he cried, hurrying into Elaine's room. "It's in this room—a deadly gas—arsenuretted hydrogen."

He tore open the windows.

"Have her moved," he shouted to Aunt Josephine. "Then have a vacuum cleaner go over every inch of wall, carpet and upholstery."

Standing beside her, he breathlessly explained his discovery. "That wall paper has been loaded down with arsenic, probably Paris green or Schweinfurth green, which is arsenic-sulfate of copper. Every minute you are here you are breathing arsenuretted hydrogen. This Clutching Hand is a diabolical genius. Think of it—poisoned wall paper!"

No one said a word. Kennedy reached down and took the two Clutching Hand messages Elaine had received. "I shall want to study these notes, more, too," he said, holding them up to the wall at the head of the bed as he flashed his pocket lens at them. "You see, Elaine, I may be able to get something from studying the ink, the paper, the hand writing—"

Suddenly both leaped back, with a cry.

Their faces had been several inches apart. Something had whizzed between them and literally impaled the two notes on the wall.

Down the street, on the roof of a carriage house, back of a neighbor's, might have been seen the uncouth figure of the shabby South American Indian crouching behind a chimney and gazing intently at the Dodge house.

As Craig had thrown open Elaine's window and turned to Elaine the figure had crouched closer to the chimney.

Then with an uneasy determination, he slowly raised the blowgun to his lips.

I jumped forward, followed by Doctor Hayward, Aunt Josephine and Marie. Kennedy had a peculiar look as he pulled out from the wall a blowgun dart similar in every way to that which had killed Michael.

"Craig!" gasped Elaine, reaching up and laying her soft, white hand on his arm in undisguised fear for him, "you—you must give up this chase for the Clutching Hand!"

"Give up the chase for the Clutching Hand?" he repeated in surprise. "Never! Not until either he or I am dead!"

There was both fear and admiration mingled in her look, as she reached down and patted her dainty shoulder encouragingly.

(TO BE CONTINUED)